

ESTHONIA.

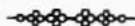


Her Claim for Independence

By JAMES CARO.

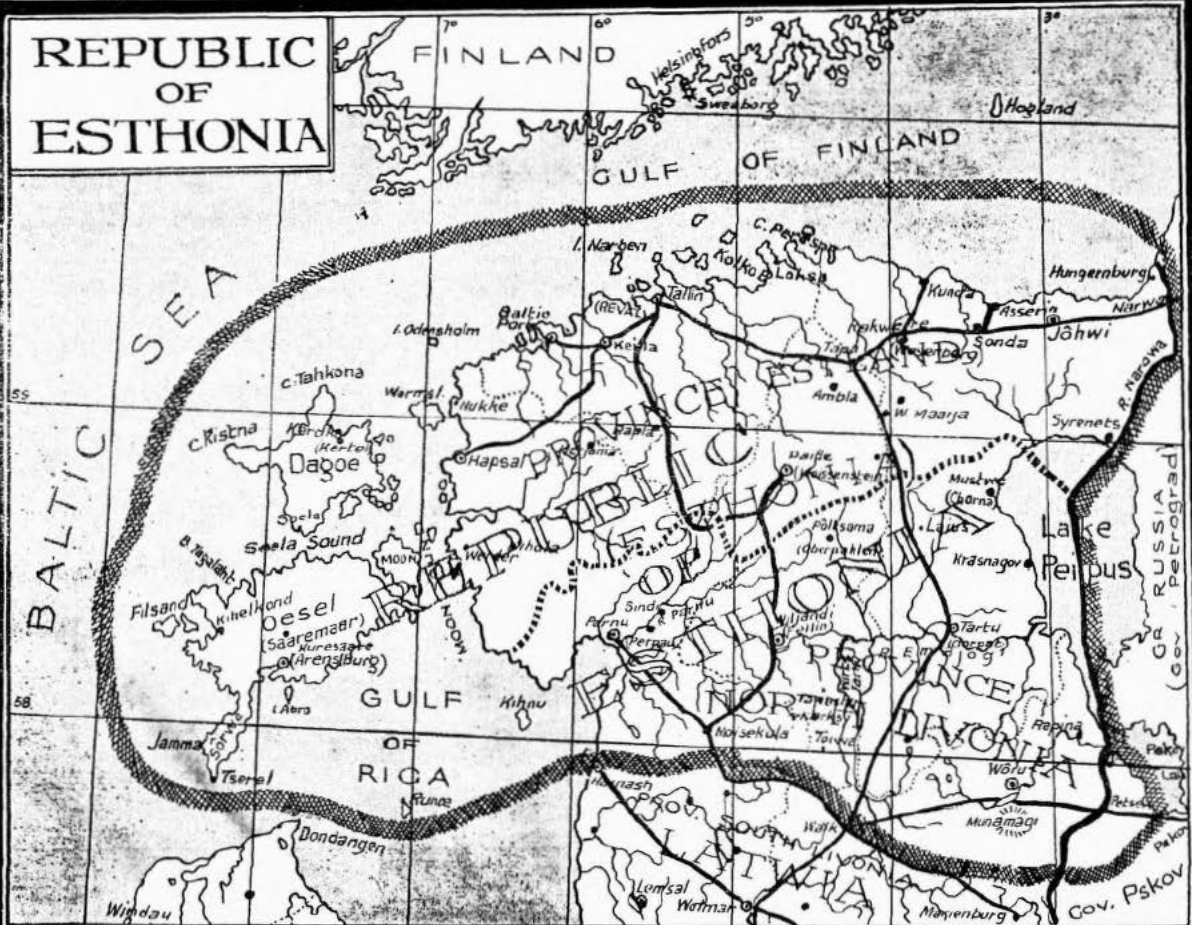


With Preface by ~~Prof. A. PIIP~~ ^{Prof. A. PIIP},
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REPUBLIC OF ESTHONIA



PREFACE.

I am greatly indebted to my valued friend, Mr. James Caro, for his admirable pamphlet on the Esthonian situation. It was under Mr. Caro's presidency that I addressed the first Esthonian Meeting in England, at Liverpool, on 26th May, 1918.

The present position of my country is very sad. German troops being in the country have established a real military terror.

The world is striving towards the day when the solidarity of international democracy shall be established, and whatever aid the Allies give to Esthonia is a step towards that goal.

It cannot be sufficiently emphasised that upon the Independence of Esthonia rests the freedom of the Baltic. Were Germany, after the War, to remain dominant in Esthonia, the Baltic Sea would be transformed into a German lake, and the Baltic trade of the Allies with East Europe and Russia could only be carried on through ports controlled by Germany.

Esthonia, being a free-transit country with free harbours and as far as possible with free trade, in intimate economic connection with Great-Russia and close friendship with allied countries, would be a gateway for the world's commerce into East-Europe.

Esthonia is anxious to play her part in the world and human progress, and she believes that this can best be accomplished by the Great Powers (or a League of Free Nations) guaranteeing her permanent neutrality and independence.

It is gratifying to have received on the 10th of this month a further communication from H.M. British Government assuring to the Esthonian people the right of self-determination and repudiating the German claim to Esthonia.

ANT. PIIP.

LONDON,

18th September, 1918.

ESTHONIA.

HER CLAIM FOR INDEPENDENCE.

By JAMES CARO.

Brief History

The history of Esthonia, like many other small nations, has been a continual fight against oppression. From the beginning of the Thirteenth Century, when the German landing—extending over a period of 30 years' perpetual warfare—deprived Esthonia of her liberty and independence, a succession of powers vied with each other for the ownership of this important part of the Baltic territory.

The continual warfare between the Teutonic Knights of the Cross and the Bishops and Danes was followed by the landing in the Sixteenth Century, 1561, of the Swedes in Estland and Poles in Livland. In the year 1660 the whole of Livonia was also made a Swedish possession.

Under the rule of Sweden the lot of Esthonia was much happier, but the German nobility bitterly opposed the democratic tendency of Sweden to render the conditions of the Esthonian farmers more endurable and humane.

The Russian Tsar, Peter I., who wished to extend his rule throughout the Baltic, succeeded with the help of the nobility and the many German traitors in wresting Esthonia from Sweden in the year 1710.

Esthonia suffered the severity of the Russian rule for over 200 years, and it was not until March, 1917, that the coveted opportunity occurred whereby the people were able to deliver themselves from Russia and elect their own Government.

Esthonian Territory

The land of Esthonia is a small country on the Northern part of the former Russian Baltic Provinces (composed of Esthonia or Estland, North Livonia, Isles in Moon Sound, and the Esthonian parts of Pskov and Petrograd Governments). In area, it consists of over 47,500 square kilometres, and has a population of about one and a half millions, of whom 90 per cent. are Esthonian, 2.4 per cent. Germans, the remainder comprising Russians, Swedes, Letts, Poles, Jews and other nationalities. Seventy-four per cent. of the population live in villages.

The capital town of Esthonia is Reval, an important Baltic port, through which are introduced the principal imports to Russia.

The other large towns are Tartu or Dorpat (Youriev), possessing an ancient University, Pernau and Narva, manufacturing and commercial maritime towns; Arensburg and Hapsal, well-known places of resort; and Fellin, the centre of the flax production; Rakwere (Wesenberg), centre of the cement production.

Social Conditions

We form some idea of the social conditions of the Esthonians from the following extract which deals with the time of the first Russian Revolution, about the year 1905 :—

"In Esthonia, by far the best and most cultivated land is in the hands of a small party of nobility. The poorest and uncultivated land has been left for the use of hundreds of thousands of Esthonian people. This uncultivated tract is the property of a handful of nobles, who exact heavy rents from the populace for it."

Even now the social conditions are not much better.

According to the Registration in 1897, there were in Livonia 908,744 farmers, and out of them about 40,594 families or 222,970 farmers had land, whilst the 685,774 did not possess land, and were compelled to work as labourers to their more fortunate brothers, or elsewhere seek their livelihood.

The Esthonians have long been held down by tyranny and serfdom, and their development has been consequently hampered. Nevertheless, the "Round Table" for March last states that there is hardly another country in Europe where the peasantry is as highly educated as in the Baltic provinces; there are practically no illiterates among the Esthonians, and there is, for the same reason, hardly another peasantry which resents the rule of landlords more violently than they.

In politics, the Esthonians are anti-German, for reasons both social and national. The Esthonian people ask neither for annexation by Germany nor for a personal union with Prussia.

There is a strong co-operative movement in Esthonia, each town and village possessing several Co-operative Societies. The establishment of a Co-operative Society in Esthonia was, in the time of the Tsar, attended with considerable difficulties—the proposal having, first of all, to be approved by the Governor of the Province.

Trade and Industry

The chief occupations of the Esthonians are :—Agriculture, cattle-breeding, and shipping. The manufacturing industries comprise ship-building, iron and textile industries, paper-making and wood-working factories, breweries and wine distilleries.

It may be noted that the Agrarian conditions of this country are unfavourable.

Foreign commerce and shipping have been very considerably developed. Esthonian sailors are well-known all over the world.

Imports

The chief imports into Russia through the important Esthonian port of Reval are English and American manufactures, cotton and coal.

Exports

The principal exports are timber, corn, spirit, flax, and cattle products.

Political Position

Prior to the Russian Revolution of 1917, the Central Self Government was in the hands of the local baronial Landtags. Only in Municipal government were the people able to participate.

By the law of the Russian Provisional Government of 12th April, 1917, in place of these nobility Landtags, the Esthonian National Council or Diet was established on the basis of universal suffrage. This Diet was elected on 7/8th July, 1917.

The Landtags of nobility in Esthonia, Livonia and Oesel were relieved of the business of local administration and self-government. The National Council was also obliged to elaborate a final Esthonian Constitutional Law. This Council elected and established a Government for the country.

During all this time the Esthonian people and National Council were quite loyal to Russia, their desire being to become a state in the Russian Federation.

After the Bolshevik revolution in November last, because of the interior anarchy in Russia, the Esthonian National Council proclaimed its independency on the 28th November (as, of course, the disintegration of the Russian Army prevented any possibility of help from that quarter to assist Esthonia in defending her rights against Germany), and decided to convoke an Esthonian Constituent Assembly. The National Council based the legality of this decision on the rights of democratic representation of the whole of the Esthonian population, and on the principle of self-determination of nations, recognised by the Russian Government as the status of the country.

The Government, together with the Executive Committee of the National Council, and leaders of political parties, were given full power to take extraordinary measures for the safeguarding of the country.

It did not take long for the influence of Bolshevism to spread and take root in Esthonia, and the Government was, as a consequence, temporarily paralysed in the execution of its duties.

As soon as the Bolshevik terror made itself manifest in Esthonia, the German Barons appealed to Germany for troops to occupy Esthonia, and proposed to the Esthonian Government that it should join in this petition, and adopt German protection. The Esthonian Government and the whole Esthonian population refused to associate themselves with such proposals, and denied the right of the German Barons to act as the mouthpiece of the people.

German Invasion

Despite the indignation of the Esthonian people and its representative organs, the Esthonian German nobility decided on the 28th January, 1918, to make a formal application to the German Government to occupy the country with German troops. Against such appeal the authorised representative of the Provisional Government of Esthonia in Stockholm made official protest on the 4th February, 1918, to the German Government.

The German motive in occupying the country was to combat the anarchy and lawlessness of the Bolsheviks who had declared that the Esthonian nobility were outlaws.

As a fact, however, it is to be noted that the reason advanced for the introduction of German troops into Esthonia did not exist, as the Esthonian Government had succeeded in overthrowing the domination of the Bolsheviks and establishing a satisfactory state of order in the country.

On February 24th, the Provisional Government of Independent and Democratic Republic of Esthonia was finally formed, with C. Paets, as Prime Minister, at the head.

Upon the renewal of hostilities with Russia, Germany sent her troops across the Moon Sound, and occupied the Verder, Leal and the whole of Esthonia.

Present Position

The situation in Esthonia at present is, that the Esthonian Government is deprived of its power de facto, the democratic municipal bodies elected and established in 1917 have been disbanded; in Reval a German has been appointed Mayor, and with him a committee of eighteen Germans (the Esthonians refused to participate in this committee); in Dorpat a German merchant has been created Mayor, and in all the villages the committees elected on the basis of the common electoral law have been dismissed. The Esthonian newspapers are suppressed, many of the Esthonian politicians

are arrested and shot, and the German language introduced in the schools, and adopted as the official language of the country.

In these circumstances, the formation of an Estonian Constituent Assembly, as formerly intended, is an impossibility, especially in view of the fact that the process of election could not be carried out under the present Germanic regime.

The Cry of the People

The elections in January last were, unfortunately, not completed. It is to be noted, however, that 70 per cent. of the people voted for the absolute independence of Estonia, the remainder preferring an Autonomy, but as part of the Russian Federation. This is conclusive proof that the democratic will expressed by the people is unanimous for Independence. At the present time, whilst German troops are in the country, the only recognised lawful Government is the Estonian National Council, or Diet, and the Provisional Government authorised by it.

German Barons' Plans.

The German nobility have taken it upon themselves to speak on behalf of the country, expressing their desire for a personal union with Prussia. That they have this right to speak is hotly disputed by the whole of the Estonian population. A detailed protest was made to the German Government by the Estonian Delegation in Stockholm on 21st March, 1918. A further protest against the resolution of the Estonian-Livonian Landessrat's proposition of a union with Prussia was also made to the German Chancellor and Foreign Secretary of State by the Plenipotentiary Estonian Delegation in Christiania on 13th of April, 1918. These protests were published in the German newspapers. A new protest was made on the 3rd July against German oppression in the country.

Estonian Independence

Before the German invasion, the Estonian National Council in Reval, representing the whole population, proclaimed the independence of Estonia and authorised a delegation to the Foreign Powers asking them to recognise the Independence of the Democratic Republic of Estonia within her ethnographical frontiers, including the Isles of Moon Sound; to recognise the Provisional Government authorised by the Estonian National Council as the only legal power of Estonia, and to grant to Estonia the right to participate at the general Peace Conference to enable her to defend her interests and introduce the question of Estonian perpetual neutrality and its international guarantees.

The delegation has received answers from the British, French, and Italian Governments, granting provisional recognition to the Estonian National Council as a *de facto* independent body.

These replies reaffirm the Memorandum presented by the British Legation at Stockholm on 20th March, 1918, wherein it was stated that His Majesty's Government was prepared to give recognition to the Estonian Constituent Assembly as a *de facto* independent body until the peace congress "when the future status of Estonia ought to be settled on the principle of self-determination. His Majesty's Government will not recognise any settlement which is contrary to this principle."

Meantime, the delegates of the Estonian National Council are received by the British and French Governments as the informal diplomatic representatives of the Estonian Provisional Government.

The German Government will not, however, recognise the justice of the Estonian cause, and is heedless to the overwhelming demands of the Estonians for Independence.

It may be asked whether Esthonia is large enough to become an independent state. Her territory exceeds 47,000 square kilometres, and may be compared with the following figures of the small states:—

	square kilometres.
Switzerland	39,000
Denmark	37,000
Holland	31,000
Belgium	28,000
San Marino	60

Esthonia is, therefore, larger than Switzerland, Denmark, Holland or Belgium. She is about one-tenth the size of France, and one-twelfth of Germany.

The population of Esthonia is as follows:—

Esthonians in the country	1,350,000
Other nationalities	150,000
Total	1,500,000

For purposes of comparison it may be remarked that Denmark has a population of 2,700,000, Switzerland 3,700,000, Holland 6,100,000, and San Marino 11,000.

Esthonia possesses only 35/40 inhabitants per square kilometre as compared with 100/150 in other countries. Belgium has 254 inhabitants per square kilometre, and Holland 185.

The poor agrarian condition is the cause of the paucity of the population, and has encouraged the Esthonians to emigrate.

It is confidently anticipated that after the needed social and agrarian reforms have been completed, the population will considerably increase.

It can therefore be seen that, provided it is the will of the people, Esthonia is quite suited to be an independent State.

Importance of Esthonia's Independence to Great Britain

It is very essential that Esthonia with her important ports of Reval, Baltic Port, Pernau, Narva, Khelkond, etc., so favourably situated as the doorway to the great Russian markets, should be free and independent. Here is the spot, naturally adaptable, for the development of international commerce.

The intention of the Esthonian Provisional Government is that Esthonia, as far as possible, shall be a free-trade country, with free harbours for international trade with Russia.

It is suggested that Great Britain and the Allies cannot be indifferent to the fate of Esthonia, seeing that it involves a question of free commerce with Russia without German control. It is well-known that Germany considers Esthonia as the chief key of the Baltic Sea into Russia, and it is principally because of this fact that the German Government is unwilling to grant freedom to Esthonia.

Courland and Finland are under German influence, and if Esthonia is not freed from the fetters of Germany, and permitted to maintain her independence, the Baltic Sea practically becomes a German lake.

Esthonia's sons look anxiously and pleadingly to Great Britain, France, Italy, the United States and other Allies and democracies for their help in assisting them to obtain the independency of their beloved but unfortunate country, and to enable them to fulfil their obligations to human progress and civilisation, untrammelled by the heavy chains of German domination.

